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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

CHATEAUBRIAND'S INFLUENCE ON THE REVIVAL OF RELIGIOUS FEELING AFTER THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

by

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(A. B., Dartmouth College, 1933)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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INTRODUCTION

Chateaubriand is generally known, or at least thought of, as the author of "René", a morbidly pessimistic presentation of a vain, inert personality, usually considered to be that of the author himself. The trouble with this conception is, if the story of René has been read at all, it must have been very superficially, or else with the deliberate intention of not understanding René's personality. It is pessimistic and vain, perhaps even morbid, but there is in it none of the utter despondency of irreligion. And furthermore, it is one of the least characteristic of the writer's works.

Chateaubriand's personality, like anyone else's, cannot be understood except by a study of his childhood, and in fact his whole life. But before going into that, a presentation of the situation in France with regard to religion, before his influence affected it, will be given.

His religious sincerity, as well as his veracity with regard to other things, has often been questioned, but his influence and artistry never have. The revival of Christianity after the Revolution, though never entirely attributed to him, is universally admitted to have been greatly affected by his works, especially the "Génie du Christianisme".

It is interesting to note that French critics invariably have more sympathy for him, and understand him better, than American or English critics. The latter, particularly the modern ones, have little patience with the romantic temperament, and little respect for his literary masterpiece, which they describe as illogical and even confused; but there is only one, Saillens, (incidentally a Protestant clergyman) who goes so far as to speak of him as a "brilliant but shallow mind", and dismiss him without a word concerning his influence.

Only his own biographers, who have made a study of his life, seem to realize that he underwent a complete change, a religious conversion,

INTRODUCTION

between the time of the writing of "René" and the time of his other works. They speak of him only with the utmost respect and admiration regarding every aspect of his life.

But this is not a defense of Chateaubriand. It is a consideration, objective and impersonal, of the influence of his works. This consists, first, of a statement of the religious situation before his writing; second, a discussion of his life, in an attempt to help toward an understanding of his ideas and attitudes; third, a discussion of all of his principal works; fourth, a statement of the later religious situation; and fifth, an attempt at attributing to Chateaubriand as much credit as is his due, and no more, in bringing about this change.

I

The Church, in revolutionary France, was an institution, not a group of religious people. The people had no time nor inclination to give religion any thought. Those of them who took it for granted continued to do so, but the previous seventy-five years had so undermined the real Christian spirit that the confusion of the revolutionary period almost completely wiped out all personal and sincere belief. The Church as an institution could go on because of the momentum it had gained in seventeen centuries, - not for long, of course, but its history from 1789 to 1802 shows that it was faring better than the faith of its individual members.

The Constituent Assembly, whose business it was to guide the reorganization of the state, also found that it had the reorganization of the Church on its hands. They were inextricably bound up, one in the other, because of the close relationship throughout the years, and it was not desired to sever this relationship; in fact it would have been impossible to do so. The two had to be reorganized and resyncretized.

A number of religious orders were abolished, largely as an economy measure, and for the same reason the number of dioceses and parishes was reduced. The bishops, formerly appointed by the king, were now to be elected by the new sovereign, the people. There was no actual proclamation of Catholicism as the state religion, but it was tacitly assumed that the personnel of the Church and that of the nation were approximately identical, and it was the only form of worship openly tolerated. The object was to bring the Church and the State into a close union in their common fight for liberty and progress.

The majority of the French bishops were hostile to the absoluteness of the Pope, recognizing his primacy, but not his jurisdiction, over the Church.

I

This was the start of the schism, the struggle between the constitutional and the refractory clergies. The latter had the sanction of the people, but baptisms, marriages, etc., ministered by them had no civil status. They were finally recognized by the Directory of the Department of Paris, of which the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, the Abbe Sieyès, and Bishop Talleyrand were members.

But this civil recognition did not take into account the constitutional priests, who had braved prejudice, danger, and the displeasure of the Pope to uphold the Revolution. What were they to do, now that their official churches were deserted, their parishioners gone back to the Roman Churches? They realized that they were doomed under this policy of tolerance, and they gravitated toward the Jacobin clubs, which became their strongholds.

Disorders continued, and the refractory priests were in many cases forced to leave their parishes. There was a great deal of agitation with regard to separating the Church and State, and a group made up of some of the Jacobins and those who were later called the Girondins advocated a national, or patriotic, religion, with ceremonies modeled on those of Catholicism, but with festivals commemorating the events and men of the Revolution, including Voltaire. The assumption was that people could not dispense with worship, but that the Revolution and the State formed a religion in themselves. (How true that there is nothing new under the sun!) This movement found its final expression under the Reign of Terror.*

The people had little to do with all this. It was being conducted by powers which they did not understand, just as the Church and the State had always been controlled by something vague and indefinite. They had never evidenced any desire to understand, but now the divine right of kings had

* Mathiez, p 118

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been disproved, and in fact the necessity of any government at all was everywhere being questioned. They were so much occupied with the revolution that they gave religion little thought. The Church, they thought of only in its relation to the state; their actual personal beliefs remained as they had been throughout the eighteenth century, rather hazy and indistinct. Outwardly, they accepted the Catholic theology; inwardly, they were more materialists than anything else.

But they were little concerned with their religion until the smoke and confusion of the Revolution had begun to clear away. Then they felt the need of something more real, more tangible, and above all more beautiful. However, while the actual Revolution was going on, the indifference and lack of piety, which had been growing for decades, grew at an even faster rate. For many years there had been no eloquent voice in the Catholic pulpits of France. Protestantism, lacking the grandeur and boldness of Philosophy and the enthusiasm of faith and mysteries, was suffering even more.

The effect of the sceptical, anti-religious philosophy was not limited to the laity. Many of the clergy openly renounced various doctrines, and so far as its more lucrative offices were concerned, the church had become a mere profession. Yet, with all this, the Church remained militant against Protestantism. The Archbishop Loménie de Brienne, though an unbeliever himself, had begged Louis XVI to stamp out Calvinism, and in Languedoc Protestant services were broken up by dragoons and ministers hanged.*

Whether it was in spite of this intolerance or because of it, unbelief and atheism were spreading rapidly. This desire to be rid of the fear of invisible powers was largely due to the influence of Voltaire and Diderot, and was to a very slight extent giving way, even by 1789, to the theistic

* Matthews, p 51.

but naturalistic materialism of Rousseau.

The morals of the period were no more stable than the faith. Perhaps in no period in the history of the world has such perverse immorality and selfishness hidden behind such lavish social gracefulness and charm. Officers of the Church were no less guilty than officers of the state, and the people were righteously indignant. But despite all this anti-ecclesiasticism, there was no desire, among the great body of the French people, to abolish the Church. They wanted only to reform it, but in what respects and to what extent they themselves did not know.

The worship of Reason, almost as a goddess, was very prevalent, especially in Paris. The profession of any religious faith was for a short time very dangerous, and in fact a great many of the people took up this worship of Reason as a welcome change from the blind obedience they had been accustomed to. Priests and ministers alike were required to bow down before the new goddess and renounce all "superstition", promising to teach nothing that was contrary to reason. This mad state did not endure for very long, but the tendency was there for many years.

Another attempt at a simple, direct religion (a rather paradoxical ideal) was Theophilanthropy, hardly a simple or direct name. It consisted of a cold deism and a code of morals. But its very coldness, simpleness, and dullness made it rather unpopular. Its leader, Lareveillère - Lepaux. was complaining of his lack of success to Talleyrand, and the latter replied: "I will tell you what to do, if you want your religion to succeed. Go, be crucified and buried, then rise up again; I promise you, if you do that, a very large following." This probably explains, better than volumes could, why it is that no matter how far or how often a people may, outwardly, seem to stray from Christianity, they always return, usually at a time

of trying economic, social, or political conditions. The principles are there, deep in the souls of the people. They had been weakening for a long time; under the stress of the Revolution, they almost cracked. But as soon as the storm of the Revolution had cleared, when the people had time once more for calm reflection, there began a return to their old religious beliefs. The sense of having been deceived by the loud promises of the unbelieving leaders of the Republic also played an important part.

Such was the situation that Napopeon encountered, on his coming to power. He realized that a nation cannot live long without the moral restraint and support of a religion. He therefore, from the very beginning or his reign, did all he could to restore the Roman Catholic religion. His most important step, in this direction,was the Concordat of 1802, which he forced on Pope Pius VII. It greatly curtailed the power of the Pope over the Church in France, but under the Napoleonic despotism, even religion began to flourish once again.

This return to religion was also due, in no small measure, to the writers of the period, notably Chateaubriand, Maistre, Lamennais, and Bonald, the first a poet, the others theologians.

II

To understand Chateaubriand's character we must carefully consider the important facts of his life. Because of his sensitive nature, everything that happened, even during his earliest years, had a tremendous effect on his outlook on life.

He had no evident affection for his parents, and his only companion and confidant during his childhood was his sister, Lucile. In fact, his love for her seems to have been almost morbid, but that was not extraordinary, because almost every aspect of his life was tinged with a morbid and sentimental pessimism. This he probably inherited from his father, at least in part, for the latter was a stern, forbidding, and taciturn man.

He felt the lack of any close relationship with his parents, and grew up with strong leanings toward imaginativeness and the romantic melancholy which was to play such an important part in his writings.

François, even as a child, was intensely religious, and we must distinguish from the beginning between his moral infirmities and his religious devoutness. The pious zeal with which he prepared for his First Communion was intense and real, but all his religious training was not sufficient to cope with the influence of the eighteenth century writers, particularly Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The Anti-Christian spirit that was pervading France at the time gradually undermined his faith, and left but a spark, which, however, was rekindled a number of years later, as a result of his great sorrow on the death of his mother.

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"Le Compagnon des vents et des flots" was that simply because he could not mingle with the other children without a feeling of inferiority, so he remained apart, amusing himself by admiring the grace of the birds and the vastness of the sea. His innate pride was in this way increased, and a corresponding increase was noted in his sensitivity and aloofness. Here, also, was the beginning of his melancholy, the inevitable result of a lonely, introspective life. As a boy he scarcely knew what it was to laugh.

His education was intended to fit him for the naval service, and after two years at Rennes, he departed for Brest to take the examination for midshipmen, but there was some unexplainable delay in the appointment, and with his characteristic ennui, he decided not to wait. He went home to Combourg, where the family was then living, and informed them that he had decided to enter the priesthood. He started to study for this at Dinan, but it was not long till his interest waned, and he returned once more to Combourg, where he remained for two years. It was during this time of idleness, when he had nothing to do but hunt, and walk in the woods, that his longing for the unknown and incomprehensible "something" began to overwhelm his soul. His interest in religion, which had been gradually waning, almost completely disappeared.

Again, during this period, his happy moments were those spent in the company of his sister. The two, and to a somewhat less extent, their mother, were drawn still closer together by the common awe, almost terror, which they felt for the head of the family. The introspective nature of the three probably made this feeling more intense by setting up a barrier between him and them, and at the same time they probably imagined the barrier to be greater than it was.

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He attempted, on the advice of his sister, to write poetry dealing with the beauties of Combourg in the autumn, but his lack of success in finding expression for what he wanted to say drove him deeper and deeper within himself, until finally his life was a continuous state of melancholic frenzy. Finally, after an extended illness, his parents decided that he must find something to relieve the emptiness of his life.

He had long wanted to visit America, and when the Revolution broke out, he arranged an expedition to search for the North-West passage, war having no attraction for him. But he had neither the knowledge nor the equipment for such an undertaking, and the extent of his travels has been the subject of much debate. They were probably confined to the Middle Atlantic States, and it was here among the inspiring and peaceful calm of the "savages" that the poetry in his soul first began to find expression. "Les Natchez", of which "René" and "Atala" are parts, took form in his mind while he was living among the Indians. But, on reading of the flight and capture of Louis XVI, he immediately returned to France, taking with him two of the most beautiful characters of French literature, Atala and Chactas.

From the pleasant and agreeable life in America, where he had almost overcome his ennui, he was precipitated into the turmoil of the revolution, and it was necessary for him to procure funds to join the "émigrés". Thus it was that a marriage was arranged for him, in 1792, with Mlle. de Lavigne, for whom he had no semblance of affection, in order to help a cause in which he was not interested. This affair gives us a little insight into the intense dislike for and boredom with all that concerned this artificial civilization. Is it any wonder that he was happier among the genuine and straightforward savages?

They took up their residence in Paris, but Mme. de Récamier, from that time on, was much closer to him than was his own wife, and she also exerted a much stronger influence on his life.

He was commissioned as a second lieutenant, and after wandering about for some time, and suffering various real and imagined hardships, he finally arrived in London, and started to work on his "Essai Historique sur les Révolutions." He earned enough to live on by translating and giving lessons in French, but it was with a great sigh of relief that he finally saw his first work in print, in 1797. It was more than an historical essay; it was a personal account of his own sufferings, saturated with pessimism and melancholy.

The next year he received a letter from one of his sisters, informing him of his mother's death, and the fact that all that remained of his family had been thrown into prison, because of their claims to nobility.

This letter contained one sentence which brought about the complete change in Chateaubriand's character, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. It read: Si tu le savais, peut-être cela contribuerait-il à t'ouvrir les yeux et à te faire renoncer à écrire.

Chateaubriand afterward spoke of this incident in the following words: J'ai pleuré, et j'ai cru. And what he believed is what he wrote in the "Génie du Christianisme". Those five words, quoted above, negate all the accusations of insincerity that have been made against him. His life up to that time had not borne out the ideas set forth in this soul-stirring work, but from that time on we find no trace of the Mal du Siècle of René. The pagan artist has become a believer, almost a mystic. And a consideration of his life from that time on will show the injustice of much thoughtless criticism.

His previous publication had gone almost entirely unnoticed, so, to make a name for himself, he wrote an article on Mme. de Staël, and also had "Atala" published separately, before the complete work. Both of these were well received and he followed them with the "Génie du Christianisme", (1803), which could not have appeared at a more opportune moment. The people, tired of Voltaire's and Rousseau's doctrines of freedom, and the sorry plight into which they had been thrown by the anarchistic teachings of these two, were ready and eager to have someone suggest a new way of life. Their aesthetic sense had been appealed to by Rousseau, but his doctrines had proven impractical, or inadequate. The "Génie du Christianisme" simply pointed out what they were waiting to be convinced of: that christianity, as well as being practical and logical, was also, perhaps even more thoroughly, beautiful and poetic.

Chateaubriand was in the highest favor, both with the government and with the people, and he was offered the position of secretary to the embassy at Rome. He was not a very successful diplomat, and when he heard of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien, he decided to resign.

At this time there was slowly taking form in his mind an idea for a prose epic of Christianity, "Les Martyrs", and he was for some time engrossed in the development of the heroine, Cymodocée, the personification of purity and beauty. After the death of his sister, Lucile, he visited the scenes of their childhood at Combourg, and, utterly grief-stricken he then set out to visit Greece, Constantinople, the Holy Land, Carthage, and Spain, in search of local color for his epic. He acquired so much of it that, as well as "Les Martyrs", he wrote "l'Itinéraire de Paris a Jérusalem", and "Le Dernier des Abencérages", but "Les Martyrs", which appeared in 1809, is by far the best written and the most widely admired

of his works. It is the one which, more than any of his others, sets him up as a model for nineteenth century prose writers.

In 1811, the year of the publication of the "Itinéraire", he replaced Marie-Joseph Chénier in the Academy. The long-delayed publication of his "Les Natchez", in the first edition of his complete works, marks the end of his literary career. The restoration government had, even before that, made a place for him, as a reward for his "De Napoléon et des Bourbons", which, in the opinion of Louis XVIII, was worth more to the monarchy than an army of one hundred thousand men.

He held several minor political positions, none of which satisfied him from a financial point of view, but which gave him a great deal of time to work on his Mémoires, which were to appear posthumously. He also wrote articles for the "Journal des Débats", bitterly attacking oppression and baseness. He led the liberal party in their battle with the ultra-royalists under Villèle. During the reign of Charles X, he was ambassador to Rome, but he resigned when his old ennui began to reappear. During this period Mme. de Récamier was his closest, and practically his only friend. He wrote a number of short essays, and translated Milton's "Paradise Lost", but it was because he felt the need of earning a living rather than because he felt any inspiration for further writing.

During the last years of his life, he was a daily visitor at the salon of Mme. de Récamier, where he started to read fragments of his Mémoires. He died on July 4, 1848, shortly after the establishment of the Republic, which he had predicted. Mme. de Récamier was with him at the time of his death, but his wife had preceded him by several years. His tomb is on a bleak and lonely rock over-hanging the sea at Saint-Malo.

To call Chateaubriand a poet is almost meaningless, until the word poet is defined. It does not mean simply a writer of verse; it has a secondary but more general meaning. In fact its truer meaning: one whose writings or thoughts come directly from his soul, genuine, sincere, and intense. A poet must be an introvert; Hugo is an example of one who was not, and it is for that reason that his verse is less intense, less poetical, than Chateaubriand's prose.

Born of proud and sensitive parents, he probably inherited the nucleus of his personality in these two traits. The self-pity which grew out of these traits, giving his acquaintances the impression that he "carried his heart in a sling", is also a quality that is found in most poets, differentiating them from "chansonniers". Thus it was that Chateaubriand transferred the emphasis, in French literature, from "on" to "je". Rousseau had started this subjectivity, but his writings lacked the complete immersion of the self; they were tinged with sociological ideas. True, the "Génie du Christianisme" is only secondarily subjective, but it occupies a place in literature similar to Pascal's writings: so utterly beautiful and simple that they are literature even before they are parts of religious or scientific knowledge.

Regarding Chateaubriand's character, to say that he was weak is to say all that needs be said. He is criticised for not having lived up to his own religious teachings, but who has ever lived up to all that he believed in? An ideal, by its very nature, is unattainable, for if attained, it ceases to be an ideal. Browning's immortal lines, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" refutes all that has been said with regard to insincerity in Chateaubriand. The very loftiness of his thoughts makes them appear insincere, but the undeniable

attempt that he made to live up to his ideals, the marked change that came over his life on the death of his mother, should be evidence enough that he was not the shallow hypocrite that he has been called. It is interesting to note that he has been called this by literary critics, and not by his own chief biographers, who have a more complete understanding of his personality and only the highest praise for his character as well as for his art.

Lemaître says that he only began to understand Chateaubriand when he was beginning to grow old, that no one can understand a personality like that of Chateaubriand unless he has studied it, with a tolerant attitude and a desire to understand, and that it is only when we are growing old that we can realize the depths of sentiment of which human nature is capable.

This same writer also quotes a letter from Mme. de Chateaubriand, as follows: "Mon mari est un ange; j'ai peur de le voir s'envoler vers le ciel; il est trop parfait pour cette mauvaise terre". That, from a woman to whom he is supposed to have been almost unknown, is a tribute to the tenderness with which he cared for her during an illness. Whether his motive was love, or a sense of duty, it is evident that he was not so utterly idle and vain as critics would have us believe.

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III

From a literary point of view, all of Chateaubriand's works are important; from a political point of view, comparatively few are. But from a moral and religious point of view, the "Génie du Christianisme" is by far the most important, containing nearly all of the ideas that influenced the thought of the time, and for that reason a complete chapter will be devoted to it. However, each of the other works contains enough that is interesting or significant to make it worth while to devote a chapter to a general consideration of them, with emphasis on what they stand for, rather than on style or literary value.

As was noted before, Chateaubriand was, from his earliest youth, a poet at heart. What he lacked was not so much inspiration as patience to express himself in words. His trip to America interested him and, to some extent relieved the mental tension which had prevented him from concentrating. The result of this release, plus the irresistible inspiration that he received in the primitive life of the "savages" and the natural beauty that abounded, was "Les Natchez", of which "Atala" and "René" were parts, although they were later taken out and put into the "Génie du Christianisme". However, these two should, and will, be considered by and in themselves, since each is complete and independent.

The manuscript of "Les Natchez" had been left in London, when Chateaubriand left that city to return to Paris in 1800, and consequently, it was not published until after the Revolution, when communication was again established with England. Several other publications had appeared in the meantime, but, since that one was written first, it should be discussed first. It was, however, "corrected" before being published,

III

and we cannot know to what extent. But it is very improbable that any changes were made other than polishing or improving the style, because it would not have lent itself to any fundamental change in its essence without being entirely demolished. It is essentially poetic, with evidence of the influence of Homer, Milton, Goethe's "Werther", and above all of Rousseau. It is morbid, but not pessimistic; local color is obviously of paramount importance, but the religious element is strongly evident. The morbidness lies, not in the attitude, but in the actual events; and no one but a real artist could successfully combine such horrible tragedy with such beautiful celestial allegory. René is the central character, and the plan was to write an "epic of the man of nature". But, for some unaccountable reason, it turned out to be "une véritable suite de tableaux affreux". And all of these hideous episodes show the base side of the Indians' character, whereas we would naturally expect the uplifting influence of the natural setting to be more in evidence. But Chateaubriand always wrote what he thought, or felt, without regard to consistency or effect. Of course, this was written before he "wept and believed", and so we can understand the sacrilegious allegory in which he mingles the heavenly creatures with naked savages battling on the edge of a swamp, but we cannot understand how anything so beautifully religious as "Atala", or so desperately religious as "René", could have been included with such utter irreligion.

Nevertheless, these two tales were integral parts of "Les Natchez", but it is important that the "Essai sur les Révolutions" be considered next, because of its extensive effect on the people, its intensive effect on Mme. de Chateaubriand, and its strong reaction on Rene himself. From here on the chronological order of publication will be followed.

When he arrived in London, Chateaubriand was in very poor health. Doctors allowed him a year or two at the most, and, believing them to be right, he decided to set down his ideas concerning the Revolution, and revolutions in general, and also some of his thoughts on his own life.

The book is impregnated with pessimism, attributing the Revolution to the immorality and selfishness of individuals, and the follies and stupidities of the government. It further states that a democracy is a foolish and hopeless ideal, with human nature as corrupt as it is. He himself, however, is enough of an idealist to feel and hope, but not believe, that a successful democracy would some day be established. His royalist opinions he called the triumph of his reason over his feelings. He wanted to have faith in humanity, but he could not. Furthermore, he thought that life was too short for all the vain struggle over such artificialities as government; if we could just live naturally and peaceably with our neighbor, there would still be enough misery, without adding unnecessary and futile "maux d'opinion".

And a little further on, he states that any government is an evil, an unnecessary burden; if we would return to the simple life, as Rousseau suggests, we would be relieved of it. But since we will not do that, it is better to be ruled by a king than by an ignorant multitude. He believed in the theory of democracy, but as far as the practice was concerned, "Il vaut beaucoup plus mieux pour le genre humain redevenir sauvage et s'enfuir tout nu dans les bois". This was received as a supremely desperate negation of the utility of all human work throughout the centuries, and it must be remembered that progress, at that time, was generally taken for granted, not objectively and critically discussed as it is to-day. It is not in the least remarkable that the author's mother

should be so deeply affected by the almost nihilistic attitude of this work. But it was perhaps too extreme and too personal to have any great effect on public sentiment.

The next publication, "Atala", was received with wide acclaim, and has always enjoyed tremendous popularity. Though pessimistic, it was so beautiful a tale, perhaps even more so than "Paul and Virginia", that his earlier work was forgotten, and people looked forward to the appearance of the "Génie du Christianisme". The pessimism of "Atala" is not morbid, nor despairing; it is rather a longing, a wish, for something better, but at the same time, there is a feeling of resignation to the will of God. It is deeply religious, with its emphasis on the goodness and purity of the "savages"; one of the few such episodes in "Les Natchez".

In "Atala" the first reference is made to the aesthetic importance of Christianity, the motif that is predominant in the "Génie". Its appeal consists in the fact that the people were fed up with the eighteenth century irreligion of Voltaire and the pseudo-religion of Rousseau. They wanted something in which they could put some faith, but at the same time retain their appreciation of an interest in the beauties and advantages of a life close to Nature. "Atala" showed them that Christianity, which had up to then been regarded as pure theology, was really a "way of life" as well as an attitude toward the infinite. Of course, this idea, which is the essence of the "Génie", is scarcely more than suggested in "Atala", but the latter served to introduce Chateaubriand as the religious poet, and completely off-set what renown he had gained as the author of "Essai sur les Révolutions".

Shortly after the appearance of "Atala", the "Génie" was published, and two years after that, "René" was given the emphasis it deserved by

being published alone. It had been lost in the "Génie", where it had no right to be in the first place. It is a complete and independent short story, belonging in "Les Natchez" from the point of view of the author, and belonging by itself from the point of view of the reader. It is too fine a work to be swallowed up in any other, even a greater work.

"René" ne peut être comparé à rien, - says Bardoux. It is the representation of action stifled by reverie, a purely psychological picture of a soul which, though unique, has something in common with every human being. There is little sympathy for, or understanding of, René to-day, but at the beginning of the nineteenth century almost every youth went through such a period of vacillation and indecision. To-day it is considered morbid; at that time, its slight, almost imperceptible glimmer of faith was enough to revive or hearten others in whom the melancholy was more pronounced, or more complete. There is just enough difference between René and Obermann to explain this influence: the former considers nihilism the highest and noblest of philosophies. Of course Senancour was more profound, less of a poet, than Chateaubriand, and it is just because of this mysticism that Chateaubriand appealed to the people of the time. They did not hope to understand Christianity; they simply wanted to be reassured by someone else's faith in it.

And if there is any reassurance in René himself, how much more there is in Père Souel, whose complacent faith transcends all the cares and ennuis of this life. The consoling effect of his presence is felt by René and to a much greater extent by the reader. How opportune that such a character should be presented to the troubled minds of the Revolutionary period! He and "le vieux" of "Paul and Virginia" present a closer

parallel than any other two characters in French literature, perhaps in any literature. But of the two, Chateaubriand's is by far the more real, more natural. The other, who is somewhat too idealized, is for that reason the less effective.

In "Les Martyrs", Chateaubriand attempts something entirely new to him; writing with a definite, and rather difficult, objective. His other works, even, to some extent, the "Génie", had been spontaneous and personal. He now set out to prove the superiority of Christianity to paganism by writing an epic of Christianity which would be superior to the Iliad, - a noble, if somewhat over-ambitious, task. First of all, it incurred a trip to the orient in search of local color. It was not until three years after this trip that the book appeared. Every page had been "polished and repolished" until it was as nearly perfect as it could be made. But it has proved to be the least popular of Chateaubriand's works, because of this very unnaturalness and restraint. It might have been great, if his ideal had been more modest so that he could come nearer to attaining it. The beauty of Chateaubriand's works is their spontaneity, and "Les Martyrs" has very little of that quality. Villemain (page 368) quotes some unknown critic as follows: Cette épopée nouvelle des "Martyrs" n'est pas un chant biblique comme l'oeuvre de Milton, une légende chrétienne et chevaleresque comme la "Jérusalem" du Tasse, un poème national et contemporain comme les "Lusiades" de Camoëns, une méditation religieuse et lyrique comme la "Messiade" de Klopstock. C'est une oeuvre composite et dès lors artificielle, où l'auteur imite des choses inimitables pour nous, et ne devient original que lorsqu'il n'est nullement épique.

Cymodocée, and to some extent the other characters, are so impersonally idealized that they almost give the impression of allegory. The

artificial characters are the weakest point in the book; but even the strongest point, the controversial aspect, is subject to much criticism. Vinet accuses Chateaubriand of numerous anachronisms (page 348) regarding ecclesiastical beliefs and practices. This, of course, would not be known by the average reader, not especially versed in Church History, and therefore would have no effect on the popularity or the influence of the book. But it is evidence that Chateaubriand was laying too much stress on style, rather than character and plot, and thus, besides losing the naturalness which is the essence of his charm, he also loses the gentle intenseness of his characters. Velléda is his sister, Lucile, just as was Amélie in "René", but the former is primarily and completely Lucile, and for that reason less an integral part of "Les Martyrs". However, in spite of these shortcomings, "Les Martyrs" is an attempt to place Christianity above paganism in the field of literature, and whether it succeeded or not, at least it again demonstrated the fact that Christianity was something more than cold, theological, dogma.

But, if the success of "Les Martyrs" was slight, that of "L'Itinéraire" certainly was not. It consists of nothing but vivid description, to which Lescure (page 167) refers as "pages merveilleuses où triomphe l'inépuisable fécondité de ce pinceau que les nombreux tableaux des "Martyrs" n'ont pas fatigué." Of all his works, it is by far the lightest, pleasantest, and least studied. In his "Mémoires", he says: Mon "Itinéraire" est la course rapide d'un homme qui va voir le ciel, la terre et l'eau, et qui revient dans ses foyers avec quelques sentiments de plus dans le coeur. It is pure and delightfully spontaneous description, the theme, if it may be called such, being the demonstration of the insignificance of man beside the monuments of history, and the insignificance of the very monuments in

relation to the vastness and tranquillity of nature.

It is beautiful in its simplicity, imaginative and personal, yet objective and factual. Lemaître says it represents Chateaubriand's poorest work; Bardoux places it near, if not at, the top of the list. It is undisputedly the most popular, except, of coursem "René", "Atala", and possibly the "Dernier Abencérage".

The latter is by far the least typical of all Chateaubriand produced. It is simply an outlet for the extra local color that he had been unable to use, but still it retains the inevitable plot of unrequitable love.

This book was not published until the complete works appeared (1826-1831), and therefore had no effect on the religious sentiment of the post-revolutionary period, but, like the following, it may in some way help us to understand Chateaubriand. From 1814 to 1840 he published a number of works on various political and literary topics. The first was "Bonaparte et les Bourbons" (1814). For three years before that he had been working on his "Mémoires", but scarcely had the Empire fallen when this attack on the character and policies of Napoleon appeared. It contains a sincere and lucid statement of Chateaubriand's political ideas, and was followed by several others upholding his conservative royalism, notably "La Monarchie selon la Charte".

There was a second period in his life, in which he wrote many controversial tracts for the "Conservateur" and the "Journal des Débats", and this period was followed by another literary one. It was, however, a sort of second-hand literature that he produced. His "Essai sur la Littérature Anglaise" was somewhat of a fraud, being taken almost entirely from either his unpublished "Mémoires", or his other previous works, and having little to do with English literature. It served as a sort of

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introduction to his translation of "Paradise Lost".

Of the two works published shortly before his death, "Le Congrès de Vérone" and "La Vie de Rancé", there is little to be said. The former recalls all that is fine and fresh in his earlier writings, and the latter is the direct antithesis, - his style seems to have completely disintegrated, and it is nothing but incoherence and dissonance, obviously produced with an effort. It was written at the request of l'abbé Séguin, about an unfamiliar subject, and his heart was not in it. Surely we can forgive him this, along with a few other things, in view of all that he had produced which was great.

The "Mémoires d'outre-tombe" cannot be neglected, though its effect, literary or popular, was not great. It remains one of the most prodigious masterpieces of French literature. It has a charm, a graceful strength, a complacent maturity, which should place it before all of Chateaubriand's other works, and in fact it is so considered by many critics. Julleville calls it the most powerful and the most varied work in French prose.

IV

However great or small the importance of any of Chateaubriand's works, it is indisputable that out of the twenty-two volumes, the "Génie du Christianisme" is in a class by itself. If ever a work of art came from its creator's soul, this did. It grew directly out of the five words, "J'ai pleuré, et j'ai cru", a simple, direct, and concise statement of one of the most important changes, and one of the greatest, that a man ever underwent. Its effect on French letters is immeasurable, on French thought perhaps even more so. The time at which it appeared could not have been more opportune, the Concordat having just been signed, reestablishing Catholism as the state religion.

Regardless of the often-made statement, admitted indeed by himself, that he saw in the religious restoration which he advocated a return of the monarchical government, any design other than that of the triumph of Christianity was secondary and almost negligible. The very nature of the book proves this. It is in no sense controversial, and seems almost inspired, certainly not written with any secondary or surreptitious intention.

It is generally considered to deal only with the beauties of Christianity, and not with its practical, theological, or moral aspects. Nothing could be further from the truth. Beauty is unquestionably the keynote, but the practicality and usefulness of this religion, and its superiority in that regard to all others, is strongly and logically brought out. In the section dealing with the sacraments, for instance, there is a statement of the attitude of the Catholic Church regarding marriage and divorce. It is a beautiful expression of a beautiful

sentiment, but the stress, in this case, is laid on the fact that it is the most practical and useful attitude that there can be on the subject. This is not the place to settle the relationship of beauty and utility, but reading this short chapter certainly makes it seem less of a problem.

Chateaubriand's critics accuse him of going beyond the poetic and stopping short of the apologetic, thus being neither great as a poet, nor important as an apologist. But the fact is that he actually reaches the point where he becomes an apologist, and at the same time retains enough poetry to predominate. Thus, instead of being neither, he is both, but to anyone who knows and feels the Christian religion, it is impossible to see the two qualities as entirely separate. If anything, but especially a religion, is beautiful, what more is necessary to make it true, or to justify its existence?

The plan of the "Génie" is a study in logic and composition. It is divided superficially into four parts, actually into three. The first deals with the Christian dogma, the mysteries, the sacraments, scripture, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul; the second with the poetic and literary qualities of Christianity, in which the author brings out, more than in the other parts, the beauties of the religion, and in which he compares the Christian miracles to the great deeds of mythology, and the Bible to Homer; the third with the various ramifications and outgrowths of the religion, sacred rites, missions, monastic orders, and, finally, the influence of Christianity on laws and institutions. There is no attempt at rhetorical transitions between the parts, or even, in most cases, between the chapters; the impeccable arrangement transcends such devices.

In spite of the possible criticism that he has sometimes confused moral truth with asthetic truth, and perhaps even with intellectual truth, he has, for the first time, called attention to the great debt that modern poetry and art owe to Christianity. He points out the fact that "descriptive poetry" was unknown to the Greeks; he develops the influence of Christianity on music, painting, sculpture, architecture.

In the fourth part, he makes a thorough study of hymns, prayers, the Mass, the Holy Days, the clergy, in general and in particular groups, and so on for fifty-four chapters, each one having the same conclusion: Mon Dieu, que c'est beau! Is this monotony, as Lemaître suggests, or is it emphasis, a sincere and humble consciousness of an over-whelming greatness? This last part is notably more mystical and aesthetic, less theological, perhaps more imaginative than reasoned, stressing, not so much the moral beauty, as the poetic beauty of the works and institutions mentioned, but the eloquent charm was always there, and it was that which appealed to the people. They were not students of the classics, nor of the Bible, nor of church history.

The "Génie du Christianisme" was what the people needed, and were waiting for, to restore their faith in the religion that had been all but broken down by the eighteenth century rationalism, and for that reason it was received with more popular acclaim than any other literary work of the period.

The seeming lack of unity of the "Génie" is, in reality, a tribute to the individuality and organization of the author. Considered as a poem, as it must be, there is no incoherence. Chateaubriand is everywhere in it. It has grown out of his own soul, as a poem should, rather than be built up externally.

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The influence of the "Génie" on French letters was great. In it, Chateaubriand is seen as one of the greatest exponents of local color, both historical and geographical. Though it may not always have been perfectly accurate, and tends toward imaginativeness, it stimulated other writers, and opened up to them new worlds. Even the historians of the nineteenth century, notably Michelet and Renan, owe to Chateaubriand the inspiration for their movement toward biblical and Renaissance subjects. Finally, the "Génie" modified the French language itself, enriching it with new words and new metaphors. In it we have something entirely new in style, a style that was to become the model for the next half century, typified by grace, firmness, and noble simplicity, a style and an attitude so completely different from those in the "Essai sur les Révolutions" that it is impossible to conceive of their having been written by the same person.

If Chateaubriand's passion was to see Jesus Christ everywhere, as Mme. de Staël's was to see perfectability, the combined effect of the "Génie" and the Concordat came nearer to realizing this ideal than any other events up to that time. Chateaubriand's "Génie du Christianisme" had a wider and deeper effect on the thought of the French people than any other book of the early part of the nineteenth century. This fact will be more fully brought out in Chapter VI.

V

The negociation of the Concordat of 1802 was the result of purely political considerations. France, at that time, was not clamoring for a reestablishment of the old alliance between Church and State, but Napoleon knew that there was in the troubled minds of the people a need for organized religion, and he knew that the strongest threat of the Bourbons was that they would reestablish the relationship, so he nullified that threat by doing so himself.

There were numerous other advantages from his point of view: the purchasers of the Church property confiscated and sold by the State had been excommunicated, and a reconciliation was imperative; he could not conceive of a power such as the Church existing in his State independently, - he felt that there must be union or incessant war; and finally, he was conscious of a reaction in favor of religion, and it was almost instinctive with him to capture and put to his personal advantage every important movement.

The terms of the Concordat were such as to practically vest in the First Consul all the authority of the Pope, as far as the Church in France was concerned. The officers of the Church were to be appointed by the Consul and confirmed by the Pope; they would take an oath of fidelity and obedience to the Consul; owners of former Church property would not be disturbed; and there was a new delimitation of bishoprics, made under the direction of the Consul. However, the compensations received by the Church were also considerable. Catholicism became the only recognized religion, and the bishops and priests received liberal stipends from the government, but more important than either of these, the relations between

the Church and the State were placed on an amical basis.

But if the letter of Napoleon's agreement was approved by the Pope, the spirit with which he carried it out was not. He expected the Pope's increased power over the Gallican Church to be a tool in his own hand, and he promulgated the "Organic Articles", curtailing the Pope's power. From that time on, there was nothing but conflict as long as the Concordat remained in effect.

Napoleon's great mistake had been in overestimating his own power. He thought that the revival of Catholicism could be controlled, but its causes were much deeper than he realized. A century of dry materialism and scoffing scepticism, followed by more than a decade of bitter and futile revolution, had brought about a strong reaction in the hearts of the people. Sentiment and imagination were restored to their rightful place in the spiritual world. Logic was given back to the minds who could understand and use it (and few they were, or are, or ever will be). The shattered remains of authority and tradition were seen in the light of the futility of licence and reaction.

The keynote of this whole transition was a poignant melancholy and humility, a feeling of repentance. Chateaubriand was the patron of this sentimental religiosity, but there was a parallel movement, the gospel of authority preached by Bonald, Maistre, and Lamennais, a severer and less charming doctrine, but equally important. They taught that order, peace, and harmony in the world or in any nation could be attained only under a divinely ordained spiritual power. There could be no compromise with a civil power, and therefore the cause of monarchy by divine right and that of Catholicism were inseparable.

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While these and many other great minds were leading people back to Catholicism, the state of the Protestant churches was becoming more and more serious. They had been so completely cut off from the churches in other countries, and there were so few properly trained ministers, that even the rare individuals who wanted to attend the services were discouraged by the lack of interest and dullness. Bibles were very scarce, and, though the Concordat had given official recognition to all sects, there was no real liberty. However, there was one minister, Oberlin, who did a great deal to help the revival of religion. His church was in a remote district of Alsace, and his influence on the peasantry extended over every aspect of their lives. His goodness, piety, and untiring efforts to increase the happiness of his parishioners have served as an inspiration and model to Catholics and Protestants alike.

And it is this very attitude of unselfishness, charitable cooperation, and faith in God which typified the religion of the French people in the early part of the nineteenth century. A people's religion does not mean their attitude toward, or relation to, the church as an institution. It is rather a question of the sentiments, feelings, and attitudes that exist in the depths of their souls. Concordats may be made, broken, patched up, abolished; the people may be ruled by a king, an emperor, or a Consul, or themselves; but their religion remains something private, within themselves, perhaps strengthened or weakened as a result of political or social conditions, but never changed except by thought and reflection.

Such a period of thought and reflection was the period immediately following the Revolution. For a century or more, under the influence of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and the Encyclopedists, religion had existed

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in a strange, and at that time almost unique, state. The outward forms, of Catholicism or of the comparatively new Protestantism, were generally observed. But there was no sign of a sincere piety, no evidence of the true faith. Men's souls were barren. Their intellects were occupied, trying to make Reason fill the place that religion had left so gapingly open. They were failing. Reason had, and has, no relation to religion, especially to a religion that is in any sense mystical. In spite of its sincere and well-meaning advocates, it had failed to satisfy the need of a people for something deep and substantial that will mystify, as well as explain.

The cynicism, immorality, and dissolution of the eighteenth century had grown to such an extent by the time of the Revolution that a reaction was inevitable. The Revolution delayed it, perhaps for several years, but when it came, it was even more intense and sudden than it would otherwise have been.

The need was not so much for a national religion as for a beautiful and authoritative one. Authoritative they knew Christianity to be. That was just why they had left it, because there had been a period of rebellion against authority. Now they felt the need for authority and security, and embraced Christianity, thankful to be free of the confining liberalness of reason and immorality.

There was, however, one of Rousseau's doctrines that was retained, and in fact intensified by later writers. That was the love of nature and simplicity, one of the basic attitudes of the romantic period. Rousseau, however, though he strongly advocated this idea, never, in his own life, gave any evidence of sincerity in respect to it. He pretended to hate civilization, but, according to Pressensé (p. 389), he was never

happy except when immersed in the pretense and artificiality of Paris. But this very attitude which he preached, and probably would have liked to live up to, if he could, became one of the fundamentals of the new Christianity.

This emphasis on simplicity and rebellion against the traditional classicism extended to art, poetry, and literature, and permeated the entire lives of the French people. But there is another aspect of primary importance in their re-acceptance of Christianity. At the very moment when their indecision, impatience, and expectancy were at the highest, there appeared a book pointing out just what they had been waiting to be reassured of. In Christianity they had recognized authority, but there was one difficulty with accepting it at this time. It had always seemed cold, theologically meticulous, without any trace of aesthetic appeal. They were not looking for practical utility, convincing moral arguments, nor even ultimate truth. They wanted something to console them, something to serve as a subject for pleasant meditation after their unpleasant period so marked by lack of meditation.

VI

In the "Génie du Christianisme", Chateaubriand pointed out to the people precisely what they wanted and had been waiting for, - the fact that Christianity was beautiful, as well as true and authoritative. This he did by explaining Christianity as he understood it, and it must be remembered that he had been somewhat of a mystic since his conversion. But his explanation was simple, direct, natural; he did not attempt to account for anything unaccountable, but rather just described and recounted, showing how beautiful and comforting it could be to find something that could be accepted without perfect understanding.

He did not attempt nor pretend to do anything beyond his power, and therein lies the secret of the book's success. He realized that the people were interested in the present, and in Christianity as it applied to their present needs, not in a study bearing in any way on the past, particularly the immediate past. Chateaubriand himself had known the scepticism and uneasiness of the seventeenth century, and his one desire became that of transmitting to others the peace and happiness that he had found in his return to spiritualism. This revival of spiritualism was a natural consequence of the events of the last century, especially the last two decades, but it was, in a very large measure, due to his influence that it was united with Catholicism. The tide was perhaps turned by the one element in Catholicism which he had pointed out. Instead of morbid reverie, "on se laissa presque enivrer de lyrisme et d'art. On venait de retrouver le grand secret perdu. 'Nous étions soulevés comme par des souffles,' a dit un contemporain, 'et il nous semblait que nous allions être emportés vers un radieux avenir'."*

* Bardoux, p. 222

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* Barboux, p. 222

Chateaubriand showed the people how they could unite themselves with their religion, become a part of it, and also of nature. Rousseau and Saint-Pierre had pictured nature objectively, but under Chateaubriand's influence it became, not only for the poets, but for each individual, the mirror of his soul, the cradle of his sorrows and meditations.

That the "Génie du Christianisme" was a necessary result of its time is indisputable; there is no denying the fact that it would have been written, even if Chateaubriand had never been born, but Lemaître (page 166) makes a rather interesting statement regarding this fact;

"Chateaubriand a écrit un livre imposé par les circonstances, un livre nécessaire, inévitable, et que Jean-Jacques Rousseau, dégouté du protestantisme dans la dernière partie de sa vie, repris par le catholicisme vague et tendre de madame de Warens, épouvanté et dégouté par la Terreur, eût pu -qui sait? - écrire à sa facon. (Il n'y faudrait que reculer un peu sa naissance et sa mort, ce qui n'est pas une affaire.) Mais enfin, ce livre, c'est Chateaubriand qui a eu la chance de l'écrire."

And the fact remains that Chateaubriand did write it, and that it was one of the most beautiful and most opportune works ever produced. Rousseau might well have felt as Chateaubriand did, if he had lived during the same period, but how many more people lived at the same period without producing anything approaching the "Génie" in beauty and influence? True, Lacordaire and Lamennais produced works of equal influence, but they themselves had been influenced by the "Génie" first. Lamartine had the deep religious feeling of Chateaubriand, and the beauty of expression, but his work is much more instinctive, less coherent.

Then too, it must be remembered that all of Chateaubriand's influence was not a result of the "Génie" alone. "Atala" and "Les Martyrs",

especially, amoung his other works, had an influence similar to that of the "Génie", and "René" did a great deal to help the people who were suffering themselves from the "Mal de René".

In all of his works we find the same poetical eloquence, so expressive of the aspirations of the new era, and which appealed so strongly to the people. For a quarter of a century, his work, and particularly the "Génie", was in every mind, and its direct influence was augmented by the fact that all of the important writers of the following generation were not only Catholics, but the exact type of Catholic that had been produced largely as a result of Chateaubriand's work. Even Michelet, the historian, and Renan, one of the most brilliant and versatile writers of the nineteenth century, show distinct evidences of the influence of the "Génie du Christianisme".

There is no denying, or even questioning, the fact that Chateaubriand influenced the thought of the nineteenth century, to a very large extent, particularly the first half of it, not only in literature and religion, but in almost every field. His influence was so broad and general that it carried over from his own field to those of which he knew comparatively little, largely because his thought became so inextricably involved with the thought of the entire French nation.

It is quite possible that Chateaubriand was not vital to the revival of Catholicism and religion in general, but it is certain that, without him, the movement would have been far less widespread and unified.

The teachings of Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot, the Encyclopedists, and others, during the eighteenth century, had brought about a movement, reaching its climax at the time of the Revolution,

toward the worship of Reason and the abandonment of the Christian faith, but the disillusionment of the Revolutionary period awoke in the people a new desire for a beautiful, mystical, and authoritative religion, which they saw in Christianity as presented by Chateaubriand in his "Génie du Christianisme", and, to a lesser extent, in his other works.

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